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# Articles in Today's Clips

**Monday, July 14, 2008**

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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Monday, July 14, 2008

## 3 children and woman wounded in Detroit shooting

**Tom Greenwood / The Detroit News**

Four persons, including three children, were wounded in a shooting on Detroit's northwest side at about 4 p.m. Sunday afternoon.

According to a story on The Detroit News' reporting partner WXYZ-TV Channel 7, a red SUV parked in an alley in the area of 14th Street and Puritan and two men left the vehicle toting shotguns. The men reportedly charged across a vacant lot shooting as they ran.

Police believe the gunmen may have targeted an unidentified person in another vehicle, but hit a woman and three children standing on the porch of a nearby home. The victims were all hit with shotgun pellets in their legs. They were transported by EMS to a local hospital and treated for non-life threatening injuries.

Police are on the look out for the shooters who fled in the red SUV, described as possibly a Lincoln Navigator.

*You can reach Tom Greenwood at (313) 222-2023 or [tgreenwood@detnews.com](mailto:tgreenwood@detnews.com).*

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Saturday, July 12, 2008

# Man faces kidnapping charges in Detroit carjacking

**Santiago Esparza / The Detroit News**

**DETROIT** -- A 25-year-old Detroit man was scheduled for arraignment Saturday on charges of kidnapping four children during an early morning carjacking.

The incident happened shortly after midnight Saturday on the city's northwest side, as a woman was loading her children into a Chevy Tahoe truck, troopers with the Michigan State Police Detroit Post said.

Police said the man got into the driver's side while the woman was buckling her four children into the truck on Prest Street. The man sped off, driving the truck, with the children inside.

The woman called police and also called OnStar, which helped police find the truck, police said.

The woman's fifth child, a son, was outside the truck with her, police said. Investigators do not believe the man was armed.

OnStar is a vehicle safety device available for General Motors vehicles and can provide directions for drivers, the location of an auto and even unlock doors when keys are left inside a vehicle, according to OnStar's Web site.

Police later caught the man in Detroit after he bailed from the truck and tried to run from authorities. The exact location of where he was caught was not available from Michigan State Police Saturday morning.

None of the children were injured.

The man faces four counts of kidnapping and one count of carjacking. The charges each carry a life sentence, police said.

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## Marvin Snyder pleads guilty to killing girlfriend Susan Sheldon

Posted by [knagenga](#) July 14, 2008 10:20AM



Press Photo/Adam BirdMartin Snyder leaves court after pleading guilty to the second-degree murder of his former girlfriend Susan Sheldon.

GRAND RAPIDS -- A Grand Rapids man will spend at least 35 years in prison after he pleaded guilty this morning to second-degree murder in the November killing of his former girlfriend, Susan Sheldon, a 35-year-old mother of five.

As the victim's family and friends looked on, some wearing T-shirts with Sheldon's image, Marvin Robert Snyder entered his plea before Kent County Circuit Judge Mark Trusock. Snyder said he struck her in the head with a table leg.

"Things got out of hand, and she got hit in the head," Snyder told the judge.

Snyder killed her Nov. 1 in his apartment and later buried her body near a creek bed off the 1700-block of Alpine Avenue NW. Police arrested Snyder Nov. 8 on a misdemeanor marijuana charge and, five days later, found the victim's body.

Snyder, 36, will be sentenced in August. The minimum sentence is 35 years, which is 10 years higher than he would receive if convicted at trial of second-degree murder. But he no longer faces the possibility of mandatory life without parole if convicted of first-degree murder.

Assistant Prosecutor Kellee Koncki was satisfied with the plea deal because of the high minimum sentence and the possibility jurors could find the killing was not premeditated, a requirement for first-degree murder. The victim's family accepted the plea agreement.

In May, Snyder rejected the same plea offer.

Categories: [Breaking News](#)

## **Comments**



## Husband arrested in wife's shooting death

By ART BUKOWSKI

abukowski@record-eagle.com

July 12, 2008 12:00 am

CADILLAC -- Terry Cook grew up on Plett Road in Wexford County's Haring Township, and he's shocked by the events that unfolded in his normally quiet neighborhood.

Cook saw several police cars and emergency vehicles converge on a house about a block down the road from his place Thursday afternoon. He wasn't sure why authorities were there, and only later discovered that a man allegedly shot his wife in the head.

"Nothing like that's ever happened in this neighborhood," Cook, 62, said. "It was kind of surprising."

Wexford sheriff's deputies arrested Jay Jeffrey Stewart, 50. He was arraigned Friday morning on an open count of murder in the death of his wife, Cynthia Stewart.

Cook wasn't familiar with the couple.

"They must have kept to themselves," he said. "I've never seen them outside at all."

Jay Stewart called 911 at about noon and told dispatchers he shot his wife, Wexford Sheriff Gary Finstrom said. He asked for help, gave dispatchers his address and hung up the phone, Finstrom said.

Dispatchers called him back to keep him on the line while authorities went to the residence. They found Cynthia Stewart in the living room with a bullet wound to the head, Finstrom said.

Jay Stewart was cooperative but "visibly shaken," Finstrom said, and he told deputies he accidentally shot his wife with a .22 caliber single-shot rifle.

Authorities took Cynthia Stewart, 57, to Mercy Hospital in Cadillac. She died there shortly before 5:30 p.m.

Stewart was arrested and though Finstrom wouldn't provide details, he said investigating deputies had reason to question Stewart's initial story.

"(The investigation) revealed conflicting statements," Finstrom said.

Wexford County Prosecutor Mark Smathers wouldn't comment on his decision to charge.

Jay Stewart has a few minor criminal offenses from the Genesee County area, Finstrom said. He and his wife called to report crimes in the past, but police haven't responded to arguments between the two.

"There's been contact with law enforcement, but it was for different reasons, nothing as far as any issues between the two of them," Finstrom said.

Husband arrested in wife's shooting death

Eighty-Fourth District Judge David Hogg denied Stewart bond during the arraignment. A pre-trial is set for July 15.

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Photos



Jerry Stewart



July 14, 2008

## Survey: Seniors not preparing for legal issues

### Many in Mich. lack wills, key documents

*Kathleen Lavey*  
klavey@lsj.com

Older Michiganians need to learn more about their rights when they're in the hospital, bone up on probate law and appoint someone to take care of their finances if they can't.

That's the picture painted by a new survey of the legal needs of people over 50 in Michigan conducted by the nonprofit Elderlaw of Michigan Inc.

Other issues that also arose in the survey: safety and mobility, especially for low-income older people, who have drastically different legal needs than those who have more resources.

"We needed a better understanding of what the needs were of older adults," said Kate Birnbryer White, executive director of Elderlaw. "We want to make sure that we're prepared to meet their needs, that we're putting our resources in the right places."

The survey, conducted in December, asked 640 people to discuss everything from whether they have a will to whether they've received a hard sell from a door-to-door salesman within the past year. A final report on the survey is expected by Aug. 1.

Less than half of those who responded said they felt they knew their rights when they were in the hospital or receiving Medicare or Medicaid to pay their health care bills.

That's not a problem for Kathleen Richardson, 58, of Okemos. She's a registered nurse and her husband, Mark Richardson, is a doctor. She also has inflammatory arthritis and coordinates a support group for others with the disease.

"A lot of people, especially older people, are intimidated by doctors," she said. "The older generation, I think, they were trained to not question what the doctor did."

Almost one-third of survey respondents had created a health care power of attorney, which designates someone to make medical decisions on their behalf - but even that is not enough, White said.

"Ideally, we would want the goal of 100 percent of people having those documents available should they become necessary," she said. "It's really not just an issue for older adults. Any of us could get hit by a truck tomorrow."

## Estate plan

It's also important for people to think about how they want their estate used after their deaths, White said. But 53 percent of survey respondents said they didn't understand probate law, and 37 percent didn't have a plan for their estate.

Only 2.4 percent of people had designated a financial power of attorney, which designates someone to handle their finances when they are incapacitated. It's a simple form available at most financial institutions.



"They don't always have to go to an attorney and draft a big document," White said.

Besides legal issues, safety and mobility are key for low-income folks over 50, the survey shows.

## Few feel safe

"Only 20 percent of our lower-income households said they actually felt safe in their house, which I felt was very shocking," said Keith Morris, director of legal services for Elderlaw. "Only 17 percent of them said they were able to go where they wanted when they wanted."

A quarter of low-income seniors said they had problems in meeting their bills, and their overall understanding of legal issues was much lower than survey respondents with higher incomes.

Marion Owen, director of the Tri-County Office on Aging, said that information correlates with her experiences at the agency. It distributes information about legal resources to the people it serves through its programs.

"We try to get at people from different angles, whether they're with Meals on Wheels or in a senior center," she said.

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July 12, 2008

## 200 march for health care, education

**Nick Schwerin**  
*The Enquirer*

About 200 people marched around McCamly Park in Battle Creek on Friday, yelling chants to put a stop to the "cradle-to-prison pipeline," a system into which, some say, children are literally born, and put on a path to prison.

Organizers said the pipeline starts when children's basic needs, such as safety and health care, are not met. These basic needs not being met affect children's behavior, and advances the chance they will end up in jail or prison, organizers said.

Friday's group consisted of children in the Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools program, servant leader interns who run the program, and other people from the community.

The event was part of National Social Action Day, a nationwide event. Roxie Perry, project director of the local Freedom Schools chapter, said all 124 sites across the country, serving 8,330 students, participated in today's event in their respective cities. Chapters of the Freedom Schools program across the country argue for universal health care and other benefits for children and pregnant women in order to break the cycle.

"It just compounds the issues, so there is a direct link between inadequate health care and the cradle-to-prison pipeline," she said. She said children are born into issues, including economic, racial and others, that can make them more likely to be put in the pipeline.

Battle Creek Vice Mayor Tony Walker spoke at the event. He cited a study claiming that while black people make up 12 percent of the population in Calhoun County, they make up 50 percent of the jail population.

Perry said the program's core focus is reading — educating children on health care and the danger of the cradle-to-prison pipeline.

"One in eight children are uninsured for health care," 10-year-old Jared Hunt, one of the program participants, said. "They could be treated if they went to the hospital, but they'd have to pay out of their own pocket."

Several political candidates also spoke briefly at the event.

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Monday, July 14, 2008

# Charity pushes help on wheels

## Group needs help turning old school bus into mobile outreach for Detroit homeless.

**J.J. McCorvey / The Detroit News**

**DETROIT** -- While many charities and nonprofits wait for the homeless to come to them, the United Peace Relief of Detroit plans to take food and clothing to the city's homeless.

The group members plan to use a decommissioned school bus, purchased through a Web site, to help them aid the city's growing homeless population.

Until then, however, the bus sits idle in the parking lot of the Spirit of Hope church, at Trumbull and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

At a time when charities are seeing lower donations, it has become increasingly difficult for Executive Director Jean Wilson's endeavor to reach fruition.

Inside the bus, old car seats and boxes sit where Wilson envisions a stove and stainless steel countertop.

The space for a license plate is still bare, and much of the yellow school bus paint has crusted into a murky orange. Wilson said adding materials, insurance and permits from the city and health department to bring the bus up to code would cost about \$30,000.

There is only \$69 in the group's bank account.

"We've been finding that food and clothing is easy to get," said Wilson.

"People are willing to clean out their closets, but the only thing we haven't been able to get at all is money."

The financial hardship may be the result of bleak times for the national and local economy.

With Detroit's unemployment rate at a staggering 14.3 percent and gas prices still hovering above \$4 per gallon, fledgling nonprofits are barely clinging to survival.

"Pretty much all nonprofits are dependent on grants and donations," said Amanda Sternberg, coordinator of the Homeless Action Network of Detroit. "As the economy gets tougher, personal budgets get tighter. It's the smaller organizations that face the most difficulty."

According to Sternberg, while donations decrease, the number of people in need of service increases, which hits nonprofits from both sides. In January 2007, the action network found that there were approximately 18,000 homeless people living in Detroit, up from about 15,000 in 2005.

"People are losing their jobs and homes, which is increasing the number of people who are going to these service providers," she said.

While United Peace Relief attempts to raise funds for bus renovations by taking donations through Myspace.com/uprdetroit and hosting events such as wine tastings, its giving doesn't stop.

Members volunteer at numerous churches and institutes, such as the Neighborhood Service Organization, and Wilson, the self-professed "mama" of the organization, takes time from her work as a painter and drywall restorer to pick up donated goods from grocery stores and deliver them to those in need, using her own biodiesel-run van.

Zaccaro's Market in midtown is one of the few that supply Wilson's operation.

"We don't want food to be sitting when it should be eaten the next day," said Dave Armin-Parcelles, store manager.

He said he's glad the store can donate to small local organizations like United Peace Relief, because larger organizations are "more selective" about what they accept and can take hours or days to pick up the food. When he calls Wilson every Tuesday, she's there in 10 minutes.

"There's a lot of red tape with bigger organizations," he said. "She's doing a great job."

Link, 39, who chose not to give his full name, has been homeless for about a month and depends on Wilson's stops to survive.

"It definitely softens the blow," the Romulus native said. "It helps you get that vision back. Sometimes I seriously contemplate going back to doing crime."

Until the bus is renovated, Wilson is relying on people who believe in what the organization does, like Pastor Matthew Bode of the Spirit of Hope church, who allows her to keep the bus in the church parking lot.

"I was excited about the possibilities of using it for good things in our neighborhood," Bode said of the bus.

"UPR works in an area where people live in crisis on a regular basis."

United Peace Relief, spearheaded by her valiant efforts, has given away over \$20,000 worth of food, but Wilson believes they could give more if the bus was fully operational.

"I could just drive down the street, and people would know it's us," she said. "They'd say, 'Hey, they got something for us!' "

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# Ex-transient inspired complex for homeless

Monday, July 14, 2008

**By Ted Roelofs**  
**The Grand Rapids Press**

GRAND RAPIDS -- John Brower never heard of Verne Barry, but Barry's story could have been written for him.

Barry lost everything to drugs and alcohol in the 1980s but picked himself up and went on to be a powerful advocate for the West Michigan homeless.

Brower, 39, has traveled a similar path. After he left the Navy in 2003, his life spiraled downward as he battled booze, mental illness and medical problems. By last fall, he was drifting from shelter to shelter.

"I was financially and spiritually drained," Brower said.

He now is a resident of Verne Barry Place, fortified with the kind of hope that infused Barry's life.

"This is a place that is really, truly, about giving you an opportunity to be on your own," Brower said.

So it says on a bronze plaque of Barry at the housing complex inspired by his example: "Our dream should be that the least in our midst need no longer be forgotten, but given hope."

The \$19 million Verne Barry Place complex, 60 S. Division Ave., will be dedicated Tuesday. It offers 116 housing units for the homeless and disabled, funded by a combination of tax credits, grants and \$1.3 million in donations.

It continues a development philosophy championed by Dwelling Place, a nonprofit integrating housing for homeless and low-income residents of the Heartside neighborhood with upscale housing, restaurants and entertainment venues.

"Dwelling Place is not just about housing but about housing in a neighborhood where we are about community development," said Jarrett DeWyse, the agency's housing development director.

As Heartside gentrified with the opening of Van Andel Arena in 1996, DeWyse said, Barry pushed for a requirement that 10 percent of arena workers be from the neighborhood.

He did so as a board member and as chairman of the Downtown Development Authority, a post he held when he died in 2004.

"I think this is perfect for him," DeWyse said of Verne Barry and his namesake development.

"Verne was always for supporting people who needed the support, and that's what we are doing."

Verne Barry Place combines 72 units in the remodeled Dwelling Place Inn finished last August with 44 units fashioned out of three old rooming houses. Residents began moving in this month.

In keeping with its development model, it includes two live-in work spaces for artists to be rented at market rates.

"It is a great addition to the community," said Janay Brower, coordinator of the Grand Rapids Area Coalition to End Homelessness. (She is no relation to John Brower.)

"I think what we are seeing across the country more and more is that the approach (to cut back homelessness) is housing first. It really has been shown to reduce the money you spend on other systems, whether it is the jails or hospital."

While residents in the old Dwelling Place Inn got by with a single room and maybe a hot plate, in Verne Barry Place they have small kitchens and private bathrooms. Staff are present to offer assistance, from help with cooking or cleaning to finding a job.

"The idea is as much independence as they can handle and as much support as they need," DeWyse said.

So it was with Barry, who once said: "Most of us have the seeds for success right inside ourselves."

Barry drew on that lesson after he lost his wife, two daughters and a solid business that supplied chauffeured limousines and custom-built cars for the wealthy.

Caught in a haze of booze and speed, estranged from family and friends, he ended up a transient at Mel Trotter Ministries in 1988. A few years later, thanks in part to the interest of a former stockbroker he met, Barry was sober and hired as managing director for Faith Inc., a Heartside jobs program for the homeless.

John Brower can relate.

He was homeless for a time in Washington, D.C., Detroit and Chicago. He broke his leg in a fall in Chicago in 2003, then broke his heel in 2006 and again in 2007, the second time rupturing his Achilles tendon.

As with many of the homeless, Brower also fought mental illness. His self-prescription: Heavy drinking.

"The drinking did not help. I should not have used drinking and self-pity," he said. Finally, Brower was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and depression, taking him one step closer to a stable life.

Five weeks ago, he took a second step -- moving into Verne Barry Place.

"I consider myself very fortunate. It brings back your dignity, to where you feel proud," he said. "This is a place that is actually, really truly giving you an opportunity to be on your own."

# Training school has fewer residents, staffers

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By Brittany Husted  
Daily Telegram  
Fri Jul 11, 2008, 06:17 PM EDT

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ADRIAN, Mich. -

During the past year, the Adrian Training School has seen the number of occupants decrease, and as a result the amount of staff has dropped as well.

About a year ago, the Adrian Training School had a population of 80 girls, with 120 staff positions, said Colleen Steinman, communications representative at the Michigan Department of Human Services. The population has since dropped to 52 girls and 90 staff members, Steinman said.

"They had to drop staffing because there weren't enough to match the number of girls," she said.

The Adrian Training School, at 2300 N. Adrian Highway, provides treatment to girls ages 12 to 21 in the juvenile justice system with the goal of having them successfully re-enter the community.

Although the number of staff positions has been reduced by 30, Steinman said, the training school has only eliminated six positions. Ten of the 30 staff members moved to other positions and 14 of the positions were already vacant at the time, she said.

"Staff members are still at a pretty high ratio over there," Steinman said.

None of the eliminated positions were direct care staff, she said, and the state is still working with the people who were laid off.

"We look at them as people and not just positions," Steinman said. "We're doing what we can for them."





## Florence Crittenton officials close shelter

Sunday, July 13, 2008

By Holly Klaft

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Florence Crittenton Services has shut the doors of its last remaining Jackson-area shelter, one that had served troubled teens for decades.

A Crittenton board member said Saturday that officials informed employees a day earlier of the abrupt closure of the home at 1603 Lansing Ave., following a slew of financial problems.

"We had to close the shelter, and we're still working to see where to go from here," said board secretary Karen Lewthwaite, who also serves as managing attorney for Legal Services Agency of South Central Michigan. "It's too early to know what's going to happen."

The handful of teens and children living at the facility were placed in homes with the help of the Department of Human Services or sent to stay with family members, Lewthwaite said. Employees working at the shelter were laid off.

Lewthwaite said the nonprofit agency's outreach and diversion programs still exist and board members are looking at how the closure will affect the agency.

The Lansing Avenue shelter, which once bustled with staff, teens and their children, was idle Saturday morning.

The few lights that remained on in the darkened structure illuminated cardboard boxes stacked against a back stairwell and mostly empty corridors. Toys and outdoor play equipment sat untouched, collecting pools of rainwater in a small overgrown yard near the locked-up building.

"We were told things were not good," said Ken Toll, executive director of the United Way of Jackson County, which provides some funding for the agency.

"Obviously, the financial picture is bad."

Florence Crittenton, which helps pregnant and parenting teens and homeless youths, has struggled to stay afloat in recent years.

The Lansing Avenue facility was closed temporarily in February, and 14 teenage girls and 13 babies were pulled out after the agency failed to pay more than \$1,000 in federal payroll taxes.

It reopened after the Crittenton board decided to close and sell its 521 Wildwood Ave. site.

Crittenton left an Orange Street location it rented in 2007, moving homeless boys to Wildwood Avenue.

The agency's re-entry program that offered counseling and services to youths returning from residential facilities at 924 Fleming Ave. was eliminated in 2006 due to state budget cuts.

Crittenton employees have said paychecks were late or bounced multiple times in the past year, including just before Christmas.

One staff member said recently issued paychecks also have bounced and health-care benefits were

canceled due to nonpayment.

Efforts to reach Bob Powell, executive director of the facility, were unsuccessful Friday and Saturday.

However, other officials acknowledged that the agency was having problems making payroll on time.

“We’re going to handle it as best we can,” Lewthwaite said of ensuring employees are paid. “There was a money-flow problem, and we decided it was only fair to them to close the shelter.”

United Way is trying to find a way to move Florence Crittenton programs to other agencies to create as little interruption in services as possible, Toll said.

“It’s a tough world for nonprofits right now, and it’s been tough for the last two years,” Lewthwaite said. “We’re trying to find a way to keep the services in the community. ... The community clearly needed a shelter, but we don’t have one at this point.”

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## **\$6 million grant to help school district expand Family Resource Centers**

Posted by [llupo](#) July 14, 2008 07:01AM

MUSKEGON — A nearly \$6 million federal grant awarded to Muskegon Public Schools will expand "Family Resource Centers" that connect families with local agencies.



Linda Wierenga

The Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative grant will provide \$1.43 million to the school district for each of the next four years.

The grant will bring Family Resource Centers to McLaughlin and Nims elementary schools and Muskegon High School.

The money primarily will be used for staff, including three caseworkers to be hired by the Department of Human Services, one caseworker to be hired by Community Mental Health and a family court liaison that will be hired by the court, said Linda Wierenga, executive director of elementary education for Muskegon Public Schools.

Muskegon Public Schools will hire a director for the program, a social worker/counselor and a parent coordinator, Wierenga said.

"The whole idea is to do a better job of providing support to our students and families so they can be successful in school," Wierenga said.

All the staff will work to link students referred to the centers with the services they need. Family Resource Centers, which are located in 10 area schools, work closely with other local social service agencies, though they initially were established by the county DHS office.

The newest resource centers will provide services beyond the current centers -- services dictated by terms of the grant.

The grant requires the program address school violence; drug, alcohol and tobacco use; behavioral and emotional issues; mental health needs; and the needs of young children.

"It's very ambitious," Wierenga said. "There's a lot of detail in there about the kinds of things we've committed to doing."

For example, the district's parent liaison will identify young children receiving child care from unlicensed providers and get those providers some training with the goal of improving young children's school readiness, Wierenga said.

The district also will work with police to identify safe routes for children to walk to school and with dispute resolution mediators to develop a school "culture where there are better ways to resolve conflict than through violence and aggression."

The district's new social worker/counselor will work with students in the district's four elementary schools without Family Resource centers, which are Bluffton, Moon, Oakview and Nelson, and refer those who need service to one of the centers.

"Basically all the students in the district should have access to a Family Resource Center," Wierenga said.

The grant also will pay for security cameras at the district's M-TEC building, which houses alternative and adult education and preschool and child care programs.

The federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students grants are used to design "a network of effective services" to promote healthy childhood development, and prevent violence and alcohol and other drug abuse, according to the U.S. Department of Education, which administers the grants.

For fiscal year 2008 only, 61 grants totaling \$74.6 million were awarded. Muskegon will get \$1.4 million in 2008-09, and subsequent years' grants are dependent on lawmakers approving grant funding and progress in meeting the grant's goals.

One other grant, to Waterford School District, was awarded in Michigan.

Muskegon Superintendent Colin Armstrong said the Family Resource Centers "change the life of the child."

"What they do for kids is what they need to survive the life they are experiencing," Armstrong said.

Categories: [Muskegon schools](#), [Top Stories](#)

## Comments

Footer

# Charity clients suffer as drivers can't afford to keep filling up

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BY STEVE NEAVLING • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • JULY 14, 2008

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Some metro Detroiters most affected by gas prices can't even drive.

There's 81-year-old Teresa Wooten of Detroit, who has severe arthritis and requires an oxygen mask to breathe.

"I'm not able to cook or do anything," Wooten said last week. "I need warm meals."

She applied for a program that delivers warm meals to homebound seniors, but Detroit's Meals on Wheels placed her on a waiting list of 750 people. The agency is among many in the region that rely upon volunteer drivers to provide services to clients.

As fuel prices climb to record highs, fulfilling the needs of people like Wooten is increasingly difficult. Disadvantaged people without transportation are losing out on warm meals and rides to doctor appointments, pharmacies and food banks because more and more volunteers can't afford to fill up their tanks. For those who are ill, frail or living with disabilities, volunteer drivers often are all they have.

"There is an ungodly demand right now, but we have to turn people away because we don't have the volunteers," said Gary Simon, chairman of Fish Dial-A-Ride of Western Wayne County, which is forced to turn down dozens of people monthly.

The nonprofit group is way short of the 25 volunteers it needs to meet the demand. The group lost three drivers already this summer because of gas prices, leaving it with just nine.

Officials at local Meals on Wheels programs expect waiting lists to grow. And because gas costs are consuming their budgets, they are shifting the type of food they provide to their 1,400 clients -- in some cases going to frozen meals because they are cheaper and require fewer deliveries.

The change can be a problem, said Vera Thompson, 85, chief executive officer of We Care Senior Meals Program in Detroit, which made the switch to frozen meals for some of its clients.

"Some of these people can't even use a microwave," said Thompson, who often lends drivers money to make the trips. "If we can't provide meals, these people will end up in nursing homes."

There is little more the agency can do. The cost to reimburse drivers at the program increased from \$1,200 in January to more than \$2,500 in June because of higher gas prices.

The loss of volunteer drivers is forcing one provider to deny rides for some cancer patients -- some in their last stages -- to hospitals for chemotherapy and radiation treatments, said Liz Yockey, community program manager for the Metro Detroit Area Service Center of the American Cancer Society.

Disadvantaged children also are losing out.

Many were turned down last week for an annual camp outing hosted by the Salvation Army in Dearborn because the cost to drive kids to Leonard in Oakland County was too expensive. At Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metropolitan Detroit, fewer mentors are driving underprivileged kids to sporting events and movies, opting instead to play games at children's homes or visiting a local park.

Average gas prices in the state hit \$4.18 a gallon last week -- compared with \$2.10 in January 2007.

As gas prices rise, so does the cost of food, as vendors charge more to offset transportation expenses.

For some volunteers, the cost of gasoline is forcing them to choose between family and the people who most need their help.

"If I don't deliver these meals, seniors don't eat," said Eugene Reese, 58, a Detroit Senior Meals Program volunteer who spends \$120 a week on gas to provide meals to 60 people five days a week. "And if they don't eat, they could die."

Contact STEVE NEAVLING at 586-469-4935 or [sneavling@freepress.com](mailto:sneavling@freepress.com).